

⁴⁸⁹
⁵⁰¹ distances along or parallel to navigable streams rather than using canoes although these were available. All the inhabited places, as well as those frequented for any other purpose, are linked by well defined trails which are as permanent and as well known to the natives as our highways are to us. There are also long trails, their "through highways" or "interstate thoroughfares," that connect with the regions of other tribal groups, for instance to the Gran Sabana and to the Maquiritares country.

In the sabanas these trails are self-made and are marked by absence of vegetation along the narrow track, which has a bare and usually hard and perfectly smooth bottom and soon becomes sunk a few centimeters below the level of the surrounding soil. They are very narrow. Even a main trail may be only fifteen or twenty centimeters wide, because the Indians always walk in single file and place one foot exactly in front of the other, so that the width of the trail is little more than the width of the foot. So ingrained is this habit that even when walking only a few meters two Indians never walk side by side. On the march they frequently carry on animated conversations with each other without turning their heads or appearing to address each other, a habit carried over to some extent into other circumstances so that it is rather uncommon for them deliberately to face each other for conversational purposes — a habit striking and sometimes disconcerting to the civilized visitor.

⁴⁸⁷ Trails through forest are equally visible although commonly floored with ^[412] leaves and twigs, which are not purposely removed. Interfering brush and branches are lopped off with machetes, leaving a passage where it is always possible to walk upright.

⁴⁸⁴ Swamps that cannot easily be avoided are crossed with the aid of bridges ⁴⁹¹ (Figs. 69, 70) or commonly on a chain of large moriche palm (*Iwai-pé*) ⁴⁹⁹ trunks. These trees are abundant in swampy situations and commonly a complete causeway can be made simply by felling them in the desired direction, ^[824] so that the head of one falls near the stump of the next. The heavy trunks are not transported for this purpose. Gaps are filled in with smaller, readily carried logs and sticks or with the heavy bases of moriche leaves and the latter may be used alone for traversing short stretches of boggy ground without open water.

Streams may simply be forded if the bottom is hard and (as is true of all the streams of the central area) there are no dangerous fishes or reptiles, but even under these circumstances much traveled trails usually have bridges over small streams, up to five meters or so in width, and these are almost always provided if the bottom is of deep mud. The simplest and commonest bridge is simply a tree trunk, or frequently two laid parallel. Sometimes a small pole is lashed at the ends to standing trees on the two banks, or put in crotches of these, to serve as a handrail. Nordenskiöld (1930, Appendix 4) has given some ⁴⁸⁴ interesting comments on South American Indian bridges and a distribution map, ⁴⁹¹ in connection with which it is notable that I observed no liana bridges and no ¹⁷¹

Swimming.

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The men and, particularly, the boys are very fond of swimming and spend hours in the water. They paddle and splash around hilariously. It is peculiar that when seriously attempting to go anywhere in the water, they swim below the surface, staying under as long as a minute and crossing any of the streams in Kamarata (up to perhaps twenty meters) without coming up for breath. The stroke is a rather formless but effective paddle. They tread water and remain at the surface in deep pools with ease, but I never saw them progress on the surface for more than one or two strokes. This is pure conjecture and not entirely probable, but it almost seems that they have learned swimming by imitating fishes and that it has not occurred to them that they might swim and breathe air at the same time.

Drunkenness.

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Their herculean drinking bouts have been mentioned in connection with the dances that usually accompany them. Their alcoholic drinks are weak enough to require considerable perseverance in order to become drunken at these long parties most adults, men and women, do eventually achieve

[514] condition. Such a party becomes disgusting, from any sober point of view, particularly as vomiting is an expected interlude between rounds, but at the one [528] bout that I attended it did not become seriously disorderly. It is the highest tribute to Kamarakoto character that even with the whole crowd irresponsibly alcoholic, there was no quarreling, no abusive or even particularly noisy language, and that as much courtesy and thoughtfulness persisted as was at all consistent with their condition. Children of all sizes attended and were not neglected but had an equally hilarious time without drinking. 228

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Such excesses have their aftermath and the only time that I saw the Kamarakotos surly and cheerless was the day after a week of carousing, when all were suffering severely and had lost interest in life or the neighbors.

Incendiarism.

157

A curious practice not mentioned in previous pages is that of setting fires in the dry season. The dry grass of the sabanas then becomes highly inflammable and the Indians delight in firing it, just to see it burn. Some tribes do this, ostensibly at least, to drive out animals when hunting or as a means of signaling, 229 but the Kamarakotos have, and give, no other reason than they enjoy setting and watching the fires. Flying over the country in this season, rings of fire can often be seen on every patch of sabana and after a party from the Caroni left us we could see columns of smoke in that direction for two days. The forest 228, 229 [see footnotes on p. 333, category 116 - Analysis]